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ABSTRACT

The author describes the Parent Advisory Council for Exceptional Children of Baltimore City, an urban center program designed to increase active parental participation through formal and informal training which emphasizes Black student/parent rights and due process. Parents participate in a 6 week intensive training program with activities addressing the following areas: communication techniques: group development and dynamics: problem identification, analysis, and prioritizing: strategy development: action planning: management techniques: group expectancies: current educational personnel and programs: systemwide organizational structures: and group management systems. Included are papers by three parents who shared leadership responsibilities within the advisory council. Papers are titled: "School Based Exceptional Children's Parental Involvement Activities" by E. Green, "Systemwide Exceptional Children's Parental Involvement Activities" by O. Stafford, and "Regional Exceptional Children Parental Involvement Activities" by E. Williams. In the papers, parents relate the problems and experiences of taking an active role in their handicapped children's education. Charts, tables, and forms relating to the program are provided. (SB)

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And

Advocacy For Black Children

And

Their Parents

Council For Exceptional Children

Conference: The Exceptional Black Child

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INTRODUCTION

One of the Challenges of urban education is the nuturing and re-educating of parents of handicapped children. It has become apparent that school systems are educationally responsible to both handicapped students and their parents. The assurance of a free and appropriate education that will enable handicapped students to develop to their optimum levels of performance has propelled school systems to (1) make provisions for parents to obtain a functional knowledge of Public Law 94-142, individual state bylaws and the ramifications of each; (2) provide opportunities for active parental participation/involvement in the educational programming of their children; and (3) develop procedures that explain and encourage parents to utilize their legal rights and responsibilities. Results indicate that the fulfillment of these noted obligations has often caused much conternation among and between public institutions of learning and parents. Urban Education problems have been exacerbated as school systems attempt to interpret and implement the intent of Public Law 94-142 according to the implied esprit de corps. The assumption of additional responsibilities such as the development and installation of new educational programs and facilities for handicapped populations, unserved by public education institution heretofore, and the re-training of staff and related service personnel, while simutaneously implementing the intent of the law, have compounded issues.

Operating on very limited resources, urban centers are generally complex structures that provide specific educational services to an enormous number of handicapped students as well as disadvantaged students. Bureaucratic obligations and priorities extend from the local level to state and federal levels. Educational service delivery systems are constrained by penurious policies pertaining to the acquisition and utilization of fiscal, human and physical resources. Seemingly apathetic economical, political and psycho-social factions often influence the behaviors and decision making processes of the general public in matters pertaining to education. However, many large cities are currently involved in a struggle to

survive while jobs, people, public services and facilities continue to erode. Crises brought on by fear, violence, unemployment, inadequate health accommodations, sub-housing conditions, inferior transportation facilities, desegregation of school, unstable economy, and over burdened tax sources permeate city life.

Amidst these dynamics of city life, public education centers have become the experiental laboratories of social change. Education has been re-definded and assigned new roles. Given the operating circumstances of some large urban systems, new educational roles can sometimes be construed as exploitive and debilitating rather than determined and facilitating. However, the consequences of avoiding educational change jeopardize existing resources and processes.

Therefore, urban centers have been catapulted into creativity. Innovative approaches, methods and models to meet the current educational demands have surfaced. One such model, which focuses on maximizing education productivity by combining the efforts of the home and the school, is the Parent Advisory Council for Exceptional Children of Baltimore City. In spite of insurmountable obstacles, a short life cycle and limited resources, the Parent Advisory Council for Exceptional Children has and continues to make strides in maximizing education opportunities for all handicapped children living within the domicile of Baltimore City.

Establishing Due Process and Advocacy For Black Children and Their Parents In Baltimore City

The Baltimore City Public School System is a large decentralized urban education complex in its third year of implementing Public Law 94-142. The Division for Exceptional Children renders special education services and programs to a student population in excess of 22,000 which represents approximately 15.7 percent of the total student population. The aggregate student populace of the Baltimore City Public Schools is approximately 140,000 of which 76 percent is comprised of non-whites and 24 percent whites. In many instances, the majority of the student body is composed of black disadvantaged youths.

In the past, the parents of these students have had to seek out and maintain a life for themselves at a survival level. Differentiated life styles and value systems compounded by economical, cultural and political barriers have generated attitudes of rejection, ineffectiveness and powerlessness which precipitates a mode of life predicated on dependency on the existing power structure.

For many of these parents, the enactment of Public Law 94-142 symbolized another "societal gift" which would neccessitate no additional responsibilities because society and the "the powers that be" would make all of the required adjustments without any assistance from the parents of the clients.

The tenets purported in Public Law 94-142 specifically indicate that appropriate educational programming cannot commence and/or continue until parental consent has been obtained. The volume of parental participation in the educational programming of their handicapped children offers parents the right and option to be actively involved at every level. This, within itself, is a revoluntionary act in special education.

However, the initial implementors in urban centers appeared to have operated under the belief that all parents and other lay persons were cognizant of the total implications and ramifications of Public Law 94-142. It was either assumed

that parents in urban centers would: (a) read all of the available literature; (b) possess the capability to internalize all of the innovative concepts; (c) understand all of the terminology both legal and otherwise; (d) attend all of the public training activities; (e) become affiliated with existing organized advocacy groups; (f) be forced into compliance by signing off their rights; (g) become contented with decisions from all of the "professionals;" or that urban parents were too naive, too vulnerable to challenge established decisions and were totally uneducable.

Consequently, as with other egaltarian laws which have been created to provoke radical social change, the target people for whom the law had been designed stood to benefit the least.

In communities where parents have traditionally been visible, vocal, and actively involved in the educational process of their children, the increased parental involvement, as stipulated by Public Law 94-142, appeared not to have presented the complicated problems encountered by other parents in other types of communities, particularly large urban centers. Here parents have generally relied upon the decision making processes of the public education facilities. Invariably, a number of problems were experienced during the beginning implementation stages. One exemplary problem was minimal active parental participation in school activities which was often misconstrued as disinterest and/or passive resistance to the process.

Operating under the premises that (1) historically parents have been a significant resource in the education of their handicapped children, (2) parents of handicapped/exceptional children are their children's natural advocates, and (3) parents can never be "too" involved in shaping the lives of their children and society's acceptance of them, the Baltimore City Public Schools, Division for Exceptional Children initiated a vigorious parental training and organizational development movement. The overall thrust of the movement was to increase active

parental participation through formal and informal training which emphasized student/parent rights and due process.

Utilizing techniques of trustbuilding, teambuilding, interpersonal/intergroup communication skills, and leadership development, the school system began building a parent involvement structure designed specifically for parents of handicapped students. This parent structure operates in isolation of, as well as in conjunction with, other parent organizations that are both internal and external to the school system.

During the course of a twelve (12) month period of time, April, 1979 through April, 1980, a Central Parent Advisory Council for Exceptional Children was organized and subsequently expanded into each of the two hundred (200) Baltimore City Public Schools within each of the six (6) regions. The Advisory Councils are composed of parents of exceptional children. They participate in each facet of the educational programming of all exceptional children at every level. The Advisory Councils are governed by a constitution and by-laws that were developed, written, and adopted by the parents themselves and the school system.

Parents constantly participate in intensive training programs. The formal training is conducted by the local community college. Courses are cost free to parents and they receive both certificates and college credits upon completing all course work. Informal training such as workshops, conferences, and seminars are performed by community and school persons as well as "renowned" field experts. Private legal consultants have been employed to provide legal training in lay language and to apprise the parents of pragmatic techniques that they can utilize to insure that their rights and responsibilities are not violated. Once parents have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills and techniques, they are encouraged to and supported in testing out their rights. The "Multiplier" or "Rippling" approach to training is also encouraged. Parents are utilized to train and assist other parents in interpreting and exercising their rights. This approach has been extremely effective.

An arm of the Parent Advisory Council for Exceptional Children is the Parent/Child Advocacy Network. This network is utilized to facilitate the exchange of information through the levels. The Parent/Child Advocacy Teams are a voluntary school-site mechanism comprised of one school staff member and one parent of an exceptional child. The child has to be on roll and receiving exceptional children's services within the school. The primary function of the Parent/Child Advocacy Team is to provide school-site assistance to parents of exceptional children relative to interpreting laws/by-laws and exercising their rights.

Recently, June 1980, a grant was awarded to the school system to subsizide expenses of the disadvantaged parents of exceptional children. Expenses include babysitting fees, car fare, and conferences. As a result of this grant, it is expected that participation by parents will be greatly increased and the educational programs of handicapped children will significantly be enhanced.

The methods utilized to organize and motivate the Baltimore City Public School System's Parent Advisory Council for Exceptional Children have proven to be quite effective. Although our model is comparatively new in that it has been in operation for less than two (2) years, the results have been astounding and sometimes overwhelming. We feel that we have finally found a way to actively and productively involve parents in improving the quality of education for their handicapped children, in particular and all children in general. In years to come, we envision this model to become an institutionalized facet of our school system and the learning experiences generated, through this growth process, to become documented evidence that black urban parents:

1. Do care about their children
2. Are concerned about their educational welfare, both present and future.
3. Can learn to comprehend, articulate and utilize educational jargon, policies, and social legislation for the betterment of their handicapped children.

4. Can constructively participate in educational planning, development, implementation and management.
5. Can influence educational policies.
6. Can collaborate and negotiate with bureaucratic systems.
7. Can organize and manage themselves.
8. Can secure greater educational benefits for their children and themselves by establishing a closer relationship between the home and school.

Essentially we are very excited about the fact that we have created a mechanism that will enable both school and home to carry out responsibilities and to grow constructively in a positive environment. We think that we have the rudiments of a winner.

Perhaps there exists an element of curiosity as to why the Baltimore City Public Schools, Division for Exceptional Children has invested the resources, time and energy to develop collaborative relationships and to train parents of exceptional children. While there are multiple reasons, the primary rationale lies within the philosophy of the Baltimore City Public Schools and the metamorphasis that has occurred within special education. Some beliefs held by the Baltimore City School System are:

-Education is everybody's business. This includes educators, students, parents and the community at large.

-The establishment of positive working relationships between home and schools results in students learning more.

-Learning is continuous and extends beyound the perimeters of the school environment.

-Educational change is constant and the utilization of a participatory model of change is more effective in the long run.

One of Baltimore City Public Schools Systemwide goals is to implement accountability and evaluation procedures for all persons concerned with the schools - including students, teachers, administrators and parents.

Some other experiences which have influenced the current parental involvement movement are cited below:

1. In the early seventies, there was a special education study made which revealed that the identification and funding processes for special education in Baltimore City were unique to other local education agencies within the state. The procedures and criteria utilized to identify special education students produced a disproportionate number of black male students who were categorized as mentally retarded. The majority of the other students were placed in the specific learning disability category. Less funds were appropriated for mentally retarded students. At the time of this study, the majority of the pupil population was non-white.

2. The enactment and implementation of the early-mid seventies federal legislation had a major impact. A transformation has occurred in special education as a result of P.L. 93-112, section 504 and P.L. 94-142.

3. During 1977-78, the superintendent of public instruction appointed a task force on legislation for the handicapped. Its purpose was to determine the degree of compliance and to make recommendations for bringing educational programs, personnel practices and architectural barriers into compliance. Over one hundred recommendations were made. The superintendent accepted all of them and directed staff members to utilize their resources to address each of the recommendations.

4. The Baltimore City Public Schools participated in a national research study entitled "The Consequences of Implementing P.L. 94-142" from 1977 through 1979. The findings of this study were significant in structuring exceptional childrens' programs and services. Some findings related to due process and parents were:

   (a) Most of the difficulties experienced in urban sites were attributed to the bureaucratic structure of large districts.

   (b) While there has been an increase in the rate of parental participation in urban sites, actual parental involvement activities had been limited to attending meetings and providing written approvals. Only when special education teachers took the initiative, did parents review and approve instructional objectives.

   (c) Many urban parents who attended central office or building meetings felt intimidated by the presence of the large number of staff members, felt that the process was too complex, and had difficulty communicating openly with the staff.

(d) IEP meetings had become a formal mechanism for complying with the law rather then informing and involving parents.

(f) The extent and quality of parental involvement in suburban sites were significantly higher than urban sites.

5. The most significant revelations surfaced in the actual day to day experiences encountered as staff established and implemented new procedures and guidelines. Due to mammoth ideological and procedural changes, greater disaprity between home and school developed.

Maryland State bylaws mandate that parents of exceptional children participate in the special education's adminissions review and dismissal processes. Therefore, no child could/can be admitted and/or dismissed from an exceptional children's program without parental approval. Due process procedures are available to parents at every step of this process. There are twelve intervention steps.

Assessment of all these factors indicated that parents needed to be maximally involved if their children were to benefit from a free and appropriate educational program. Meaningful parental exposure was of the essence.

Since Public Law 94-142 made provisions for the re-training of personnel including related services, why not include parents of exceptional children under this ubmrella? Baltimore City Schools assumed this posture and began to explore ways and means of making this venture a reality. The first step was the assignment of a coordinator to manage the process.

Basically it is a role of working through and with people to get a job done. Primary responsibilities of this position are coordinating the Division for Exceptional Children's staff development activities and operating as a liaison between (1) the Division for Exceptional Children and the community, and (2) the Division for Exceptional Children and other components of the school system on matters pertaining to training and community affairs related to exceptional children's programs and services.

While the tasks are numerous and varied, this position connects and interacts with every facet of the school system and the community, it processes information and is able to facilitate the establishment of relationships, activities, and programs needed to accomplish systemwide goals and objectives.

The movement to activate meaningful parental involvement activities in Baltimore City was initiated by identifying a care of verbose discontented parents of exceptional children. Some parents had originally been members of a defunct Exceptional Children's Committee. Others had been involved in fragmented unresolved experiences with the school system as students themselves and more recently, as parents of handicapped students in securing need of satisfactory placement and educational services. Many parents utilizing public education had been forced, for various and sundry reasons, to accept the current educational trends. As a result of participating in social and economic changes, negative connotations and low performances, expectancies had been attached to the school system. Its reputation and good will were on the decline, some parents were disgruntled and disenchanted with the school system. Some parents were subtly seeking alternatives to public education, but at the expense of the state. Yet, there were other parents who were determined to maintain public education and make it work for the betterment of all. Despite the prevailing circumstances and other points of view, a group of parents of exceptional children was convened to address their rights, the educational programming of their children and the formulation of a systemwide mechanism to deal with problems peculiar to the educational process of exceptional children.

The key aspects of difficulty in organizing a volunteer group of this nature were to:

1. Develop a unique resourceful approach that would procudtively capture and employ the leadership, skills, abilities and talents of each individual parents in a non threatening environment;
2. Devise strategies that would harness the aggregate energies of this group and redirect them into realistic, positive, meaningful, result-oriented activities;
3. Present experiential activities that would enable parents to become cognizant of their individual/group experiences and needs as well as to elicit self commitment to the attainment of them;

4. Establish an environmental climate that would facilitate and maintain group membership and unity;
5. Develop a common mission in which each individual parent had a vested interest; and
6. Change the group's philosophy from one of losing to one of winning.

A schematic was designed by the Division for Exceptional Children's, Office of Staff Development and Community Services to revitalize the Exceptional Children's Parent Advisory Committee on a massive scale. Upon the completion of this task, the parent involvement movement was begun.

Parents participated in a six week intensive training program in which structural learning activities in the following areas were address: (1) communication techniques, (2) group development and dynamics, (3) problem identification, analysis, and prioritizing, (4) strategy development, (5) action planning, (6) management techniques, (7) group expectancies, current educational personnel and programs, (8) systemwide organizational structures and (9) group management systems.

Some of the outcomes of these sessions were as follows: (1) A constitution/bylaws draft, (2) participatory decision making sessions with central office high level officials, (3) the establishment of formal and informal training sessions with a local community college and other staff members. The training sessions allowed parents to acquire the necessary knowledge and confidence to interact with bureacratic structure and to understand federal and state legislation in lay terminology. As a result appropriate pragmatic actions could be applied and utilized in everyday situations. Armed with new skills and knowledge, the parents began to approach individual schools and regions for the purpose of organizing on-site parent/child advocacy teams and school-based Exceptional Children's Parent Advisory Council. Parents devised their own schemes, utilized the available resources and began at a level of the school system which was most comfortable to them. Support systems were developed so that parents could operate as a group and give aid to each other.

Parents who participated in any facet of training were obligated to return to their home-school, interact with the building administrator and begin the formation of an advisory council that worked in conjunction with other school-based parent/teachers organizations. Thus far, one region composed of thirty-two schools has been organized and a number of individual schools, throughout the city, have begun the process. Findings indicate that most parents feel more comfortable working in their home-based schools as opposed to working out of regional or central offices which are larger and more complex to deal with.

Parents have been able to impact the system significantly. The parents themselves have expressed more confidence in the school system and behaviorally, they have devoted their time and energies in making this system more responsive to children's needs regardless of whether they are their own or the children of others. Parents are again learning to work with the school system in order to accomplish educational goals and objectives. They have been influential in acquiring the essential instructional services and personnel to render the appropriate programs. This group of parents has developed promotional and informational packets which have been presented to organizations, institutions and other parent groups throughout the city. They have established a speakers bureau and made political contacts, they have secured a federal grant that will enable them to increase parent participation throughout the city. These are just a few strides that this group has been within its first year of existence.

There are approximately twenty-five (25) parents who share leadership responsibility. Each parent has a story of struggle and momentary success. Three of those stories have been included in this paper for the purpose of demonstrating the realities of this situation. Each of these parents created and built her own linkage with the Baltimore City Public School System.

SCHOOL BASED EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN'S PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Edwina Green - Parent of Exceptional Child - Baltimore City Schools

I would like to begin by reflecting back to my daughter entering the kindergarten. She was one of thirty-five students. My daughter, at that time, was very quiet and shy. I remember, as I observed her classroom, the various types of behaviors of her peers. Because of the class size and lack of a paraprofessional to assist teacher, I decided to become the class parent and to become involved in the school. During the year that she was in kindergarten, I thought she was adjusting well. However, when she began the first grade, I noticed because of some of her peers, that she was having problems learning her colors, pronouncing some words, telling her right from left, etc.

I shared my concerns with her teacher and the principal. They agreed with me but felt that my daughter's needs could not be met at this school. She was promoted to a larger elementary school where it was felt that her educational needs would be met. I regret to say, however, that this did not happen. My daughter was exposed first to a teachers' strike and then to the integration of our schools. In her case, however, she remained in an all black environment where the teachers were transferred to get the black/white ratio. I continued to voice my concerns about her problems; and for the next two years, she remained very frustrated.

When she was promoted to the foruth grade, I know precious time was being lost; and the important years when children's minds are developing for learning, my daughter was unable to learn in the so call traditional method. At the advice of professionals from my daughter's first school, I had her tested and evaluated during the summer prior to her beginning the fourth grade.

When school opened, I met with the principal and requested that the school address her needs. Again the problem was put off and only until I had the assistance of my spouse, to visit the school with me, did I finally get some help. She was finally identified as a handicapped student with a learning disability.

Then the process began and so did such terms as placement in a communication center where her language problem, speech, etc., would be addressed.

Because of her immaturity, although she was older, she was placed in a primary center. Neither one of us knew what to expect; and when we met the teacher, who was white, I began to be concerned again that perhaps the teacher would have problems relating to Wanda. I am forever grateful that this teacher saw a child and a parent, both of whom were frustrated. She first motivated us by reassuring Wanda that she could learn and that I would have to help her a lot at home to reinforce some of the activities that she would participate in at school. With the help of this teacher and my attending workshops to strengthen me in the language area, my daughter and I saw self esteem and was eager to attend school.

It soon became apparent that this setting was no longer challenging to her. She was screened again and placed in an intermediate center.

During the time my daughter was in the first communication center, I was invited to attend a meeting with parents, educator, and representatives from the federal government identified as Education Turney System Incorporated. The team had been visiting various LEA's to find out the impact of P.L. 94-142. I shared my concerns about the following issues: (1) lack of coordination between special education resource teachers and regular teachers, (2) lack of knowledge on the part of parents about due process and their rights for the education of their children, (3) the affects of mainstreaming our children into programs where, in some cases, their peers would not accept them, and (4) the attitudes of some of the teachers in their reluctance to work with our children.

During this same period, I had been made aware of an advocacy group, Metropolitan Baltimore Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (ACLD), which I joined. From my association with this group, I became familiar with MAUDD, Maryland Advocacy Unit for the Developmental Disabled. By now, my daughter's needs seemed to have been adhered to and she was screened and placed in a middle school communication center. I then received another invitation to meet with a group of parents who wanted to re-organize

the citywide PACEC, Parent Advisory Council for Exceptional Children, of which I became a board member. Because of this group, I have had the unique opportunity to attend a community college for a 15 week session to increase my knowledge about the education a handicapped child and due process procedures, if necessary. This motivated me to go meet with the principal and department head of my daughter's present school to ask them to help me start a parent group in their school. With their help, a parent was identified to be our chairperson and a survey was sent home to all parents of students in the special education programs. From this information, we obtained a day of the week and the time that was suitable for all parents. We planned our first meeting. I was pleased with the response since the majority of the parents came from various section of our city. We developed a "buddy system" where we contact the parent of the students whom our children seem to relate to most; a telephone tree was organized so that we could contact parents who were unable to be active in the school; and we planned for future meetings to help parents get involved in the school.

In addition, with help of the department head, I visited the secondary schools where our children are usually placed, to learn about their programs. This information will be shared with the parents at a meeting that has been planned to acquaint the parents with these and encourage them to visit these and other schools.

I would like to summarize by saying that I feel as a black parent, many obstacles have confronted me. Although I have been a very active volunteer in the schools, this seemed to have hindered me in getting help for my daughter. Only because of good advice and my own determination to deal with the educational system and my city did I survive. I have been able to develop a direct communication linkage with my state and city political officials as well as my state and city superintendents.

I recognize also that my job has begun of the limited programs in our secondary schools for handicappped students. You can believe me when I say, "with the help of God and Unity among parents of handicapped students and our efforts to reach out to other parent groups, we will demand that all students in Baltimore City receive their rights to free education whereby they can function once they leave the public schools."

SYSTEMWIDE EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN'S PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Queen Stafford - Parent of Exceptional Child - Baltimore, Maryland

I think that I became an advocate for my son at birth. My son has downs syndrome. Not really knowing what downs syndrome was, I could see no difference in him and my other little warm babies. However, I think the obstetrician was upset with himself becaue he did not use the best method to tell my husband. During my last year in school, I was required to visit a few centers, and I think that I was a little better prepared to receive such shocking news. My husband had not had these experiences. Right away, the doctor presented my husband with the alternative of institutionalizing our son. My husband was naturally upset, not understanding what was wrong with our child. My first defensive reaction to everyone was that our son would learn at his own rate of progress, as everyone else does.

We chose a pediatrician whom we had met through friends. Being an unselfish and concerned pediatrician, he recommended that we visit a doctor who was specialized in research on downs syndrome people. Our son was examined by this doctor at two months old and we were told that he would do anything that anyone else does, but a little slower.

At this hospital, we were given literature which was very helpful. One book that we read, during this time, was the autobiography of Nigel Hunt. This book was written by downs syndrome young man, and it helped me to see that with a positive approach, I could do a lot for our son. All of the other books had been negative and out of date. The writers referred to downs syndrome persons as idiots, imbeciles, morons, etc.

We were also referred to the Baltimore Association for Retarded Citizens (BARC). We participated in an observation class when our son was eleven (11) months old because we felt that it was a good time. Our son was trying to crawl and really communicate by then. At BARC both parents and babies benefited becaue the pupils had one (1) hour a week of socialization with people outside of the family. Parents also had a chance to get positive information from other parents and to observe the teacher and aide working with our children who had different handicaps. Some seemed far worse than our

son's disability. We attended a parent co-op class the following year. Parents alternated as aides twice a week. At three (3) years old, by being persistent, we got our son into the day care program where he stayed until he was five (5) years old. P.L. 94-142 required that the local public education agency had to furnish an education for all children at no expense to the parents.

We kind of panicked because all we could think of was the "old opportunity classes" in the portables where the slower learners used to attend. I tried to keep him at BARC. I had to be convinced that they had to close their day care center. All of the children had to go to either public or private schools. If he had to leave anyway, I didn't want him to go to a school that was only for special children. After calling the department of education, though fully understanding the process, we finally took him to a public school. There was a delay which extended from the early part of that year through October. School started in September and we were told that we had to wait until the transportation office notified us as to when they would pick him up. We took our son to school ourselves; however, they did finally contact us.

Our son was placed in a pre-school class for one half (1/2) day and we were frustrated more because he had attended wholes days at the day care center. We were told that this may have been all that he could handle. We were willing to give him time to adjust.

After one year, we felt that he was ready for another level. However, the teacher felt that since he had been so inconsistent, he needed psychological tests again. We could not understand this. We started calling BARC and our lawyers to find out if this was necessary. Finally, we agreed, and neither the teacher nor I agreed with the final report of the psychologist because we knew that he was capable of more. I asked so many questions that the psychologist called me when the school board met about the Maryland State By-laws 13.04.01. I was frightened to death, but wanting to speak about the long waits that parents were subjected to before they got any action in settling their children's problems, I went anyway.

Finally our son was moved to a primary communication center and the senior speech clinician and principal set up a committee to help me find the best one that met his needs. He learned to read a pre-primer three (3) but he is very inconsistent. He has to be taught the same thing over and over again, but he does get it.

I have still kept in tough with BARC. As a speaker for BARC, an instructor calls me every year to speak to her classes. Here, I met a staff person from the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) and was asked to attend a meeting for Parents of Exceptional Children. I refused at first because I was already spending a lot of time away from my family. However, I did agree to, at least, talk to the coordinator of staff development and community relations. Well, that did it.

I started attending the meetings and ended up, after much discussion and nominating, being voted temporary chairperson of the Parent Advisory Council for Exceptional Children of Baltimore City.

As a Parent Advisory Council, we have finally drafted and adopted our constitution and by-laws, participated in team building workshops and been introduced to all of the different offices and divisions that we need to know about to get our problems solved. We thought that we were really ready to become advocates for ourselves and others who needed us. A letter was sent to the Superintendent of Public Instruction asking permission to sit in on the interviews for the position of Assistant Superintendent of the Division for Exceptional Children. Permission was granted. We even got to do a kind of informal interview of applicants, in between appointments.

Some of you may be wondering what I do as chairperson of the parent advisory council for exceptional children of Baltimore City. These are some of the things that I do:

-Conduct monthly, central, meetings for parents from all of the regions.
-Invite speakers to speak to the council about issues of concern
-Meet quarterly with the superintendent on decision making matters as they relate to exceptional children in the school system.
-Speak out in public meetings because I am often requested to speak at meetings for exceptional children and their parents at the school level,

state level, mayor of Baltimore City's Advisory Council, churches, businesses and other community agencies.

-Meet with the coordinator of staff development and community relations to plan and organize systemwide parent training activities for parents of exceptional children.

-Participate on various committees that establish policy procedures and guidelines for implementing exceptional children's programs and services in the Baltimore City Public Schools.

-Participate in interviews for the hiring of staff.

-Organize parents to participate in those interviews.

-Attend budget meetings with various superintendents for the purpose of developing budgets for various exceptional children's programs and services.

-Organize parents for all activities which are designed to increase parental participation and involvement in the educational programs of their exceptional children.

-Respond to parents' requests for assistance in the screening and placement of their children.

-Orchestrate the outreach of parents to other advocacy groups.

-Participate in training activities constantly.

-Volunteer in my own child's school as often as possible.

-Participate in setting up workshops at schools for parental involvement activities in the home-based schools.

We have organized our first Regional Parent Advisory Council for Exceptional Children and our first School Advisory Council.

Becoming involved with the parent advisory council was a big turning point in my life. Although I had been a member of various other groups and had served as an assistant or a vice president, I was always very nervous. So naturally, when I became chairperson of this organization, I had all kinds of apprehensions. One of them was not feeling confident because I had not had the experiences of working with administrators as some of the other parents had. Other feelings were that I:

-Didn't qualify and needed bookkeeping to understand budgeting.

-Wasn't an extrovert or out-going enough.

-Coundn't trust the school system to care enough about a downs syndrome pupil because I didn't feel that they had worked enough with the pupils like him.

-Needed to learn more about how the school system really worked in planning and delivering programs for different kinds of handicapped children.

-Wasn't as prepared as the other parents.

-Really had to plan everything that I was going to say to parents and to the secretaries where I had to make appointments or set up meetings.

-Had to relate my fears to the coordinator because I needed to be encouraged into realizing that all the parents had one thing in common, their children. Once I started to talk about children, I really became talkative.

-Could not deal with or know what to say when confronted with real problems unless I had help.

-Just had to be talented to form the right working atmosphere.

However, the Division for Exceptional Children and the Parents have encouraged and supported me. The past two (2) years have given me the confidence that I need to become a good leader and I enjoy it. When parents praise me now, I never hesitate to tell them that I felt, and still do something, the same way that they do. I felt that I would never be able to take the leadership role.

Many of the things that we, the council, do could not have been accomplished had we not had the full cooperation of the superintendents and the Division for Exceptional Children of Baltimore City Public Schools.

The Baltimore City School System has provided the resources of the central office of staff development and the Division for Exceptional Children in the following activities:

-In January, 1980 our whole executive council participated in teambuilding and leadership workshops that continued for about six months. These were weekly sessions.

-Summer workshops entitled "An Explanation of How to Use the Division for Exceptional Children's Handbook of Guidelines, Procedures, Programs and Services," in which all of the forms, screening and placement procedures, due process procedures, and parent involvement options were presented to parents.

-A workshop explaing the different levels of service and how our children are placed within these levels was conducted by the Division for Exceptional Children.

-A workshop comprised of principals from comprehensive schools, principals from special schools and parents of Exceptional Children was conducted to determine ways to motivate additional parental involvement within our schools.

-Approximately 150 parents have been trained at the Community College of Baltimore with the agreement that once they have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills, they will go back to their child(ren)'s school(s) and work for parents and their exceptional children.

-Informal training in our meetings is constant and consistent.

All parents of Exceptional Children who live within Baltimore City property are invited to participate in our parent training activities. This includes parents who have exceptional children in non-public schools. Training is necessary because of P.L. 94-142. This law has changed special education. It is no longer the "old opportunity classes" of yesterday.

In our one (1) year and seven (7) months of existence, we have accomplished many goals. Some are stated below:

-We have gotten a transportation liaison to help get better services for our children including better communication between the bus drivers and parents.

-We have assisted in getting additional staff such as occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech clinician, etc.

-We have received college credits for our courses at Community College of Baltimore.

-We have completed our constitution and by-laws.

-We have held citywide general meetings.

-We have participated in public speak outs and public service announcements on television and radio.

-We have helped to train other parents and built confidence so that other parents feel more comfortable in approaching and negotiating with the school system in trying to get the best possible education for their children.

Parents have been motivated and are asking for more information and training. They are becoming very active in the schools and do not fear speaking out. We feel that we are accomplishing our goals. Our biggest goal is to have parents as advocates in each of the schools. We believe in our motto, "Together We Can Make It."

REGIONAL EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Elsie Williams - Parent of an Exceptional Child - Baltimore, Maryland

My involvement with other parent groups came after a long frustrating time of trying to get the special needs of my son met. When I say other parent groups, I mean parents outside of our local school PTA. I was working with the local school PTA and this helped to make citywide involvement more meaningful. Hopefully, you will see this as we go through this presentation. Let me give you some background about my situation.

My husband grew up in a rural area in Virginia, the hometown of my parents who migrated to Baltimore in the early twenties. Here, we have a couple, coming from a very poor and limited educational background, working to raise their children to get enough education to become self sustaining adults.

The first three (3) children went through school with the normal difficulties. They received strong encouragement from home to study and to keep their grades up. They also received help with the basic facts...numbers, alphabet, and writing. Both my husban and I worked. We worked different shifts so that we could keep things going at home.

After seven (7) years, our fourth (4) child came along. A second son, we were all very happy. Our son was born with an eye that wandered or appeared to be crossed; but the doctor assured us that he would grow out of it or that a patch could be placed over the good eye when he reached age four or five. His eye gradually got better as he got older, just as the doctor said.

He entered kindergarten at age four because his birthday came before December the thirty first of that year. He had a fair two years. Our troubles started at the second grade level. He went to this grade with misgivings, on the parts of many.

In the third grade, many problems came about...he still would not complete his papers; he would get up and move about the room during his assignment time; and he was being labeled as a discipline problem. We began to very strongly discourage him and we punished him. We began to take turns in working with him to say his alphabets,

to write them and his number facts. This would take a couple of hours each evening and would be as much a punishment for my husband, who had to work the next day, as it was for our son, so we thought at this time. When this did not work, I went on the first shift so that I could work with him in the evenings. Having gone through all of this, he still failed and was given an unsatisfactory in conduct. We were really frustrated because we felt that there should not have been any really bad conduct. We had had no problems at home and he seemed to try very hard.

All of us tried to help him by calling words and number facts, listening to him read and tell us about school. He would usually tell us, word for word, what happened in school and what the teacher or student should have done.

We got a tutor for him. She felt that he could understand the ways of doing arithmetic but had trouble reading and writing. He made mistakes in different letters and number, even if he knew the right answer. She was a retired teacher and she worked with him for a half an hour twice a week. So when she advised us that the trouble might be his eye and that he was a bit high strung and spoiled, we set about to get his eyes tested. We remembered that the doctor had said that he might need a patch. However, at the last examination he did not need it. The eye still was not straight, but the other eye was good. He was growing out of it. The second eye test showed the same thing. We were fit to be tired.

We did not want him to fail again. We talked to the principal and she recommended that we have him tested by the school psychologist.

This took some time but it opened a lot of light on what his problems were and what we could do to help him. He had coordination difficulties with sight and dexterity. Many of the things, that were done, helped him. We had to give him activities to help develop his big muscles like swinging, bike riding, ball playing, lots of exposure in traveling, trips around the city, etc. The doctor also had to prescribe medication for him. With all of these things, he moved on.

Much more could be said about our son's situation but I hope to share with you some of the learning experiences which have helped to make knowledgeable parent regional representatives. These parents are able to set up regional advisory councils and to advise decisions makers on the needs of parents and children.

Regionalization and the establishment of due process are two very great steps that have been taken within the last five years. These two steps have helped schools to meet the needs of black children and their parents more directly and sooner.

Opportunities for parental involvement in schoolwide activities increased as a result of the decentralization of schools in Baltimore City. Prior to regionalization, parents were limited to contacts made. Generally, they only operated in their individual schools and attended some monthly school board meetings. Parents who expressed concerns beyound the realms of the neighborhood schools were directed to a remote central office structure where (1) communication was a problem (2) locating the right person to definitely address the concern was an impossibility (3) referrel service that often lead to oblivion, was usually the end-result, and (4) the act of participatory problem solving and management were a farce.

However, decentralization allowed parent/teacher organizations to exist at various levels of the school system, and it encouraged parents to get involved at every level. Opportunities for direct interaction at every level of the system was offered to parents. Parents could then communicate their concerns to and with high level officials who were familiar with their neighborhoods and their children. They could also work jointly in trying to resolve some of their problems and they could obtain a better understanding of each others' goals and resources.

As in most situations, the majority controlled the nature of the meetings since most of the students were assigned to general education, most of the issues addressed dealth with general education.

Many of these concerns did not address the uniqueness of Exceptional Children and im many cases, the information gained could not be applied to most of the children receiving special services. Additionally, tremendous changes were taking place in special education. New laws were being interpreted and new school policies, that affected my child, were being developed.

Discussions that included changes in special education seemed to be broad, incomprehensible and negative. Adversary relationships between parents of children in general education and special educations appeared to be on the incline. There were discrepancies over the mainstream concept and just whose rights were being violated. The need for a separate Exceptional Children's Parent Advisory Council, to function at all levels of the system became apparent. It was concluded that parents of exceptional children should be members of two councils. They should be active in the school Parent/Teacher Organization (PTO) and also the Exceptional Children's Council until all changes and concepts had been institutionalized.

It is difficult to get parents to actively participate in one parent organization, let alone two. Due to urban living differentiated value systems and life styles, planning and activating parenting projects at a time period that is convenient, and at a place that is accessible is almost an impossible mission. However, many urban parents of exceptional children realized their needs and agreed to try to perform in both organizations. To capitalize on the availability of these parents, minimize the number of involved parents, and maximize the efforts of a few, a regional cluster designed was developed by the Central-West Region. I am the Central-West Regional Representative and a major contributor to the regional cluster concept.

Basically, the cluster concept is an outreach attempt to systematically mobilize parents of exceptional children at each level of the school system. This includes individual schools, each of the regions and the central office complex. Due to the sparse number of parents who were/are available and willing to assume the leadership role in advocating appropriate educational programs and services for their exceptional children, the cluster concept was developed, by parents, to utilize a minimum number of parents.

The actual number necessary to operationalize a cluster is contingent upon the number of schools. Located within a given region and the location or proximity of neighborhood schools. Since cluster are designed to reach each school within a given region, the schematic, adopted by our region, consists of five clusters. Six schools are assigned to each. Two parents are appointed to each cluster to assume

the leadership role. Each parent is responsible to three schools. The school breakdown includes the home-based school of his/her child(ren) and two other schools. Each cluster parent is required to identify and prepare at least one parent of an exceptional child in each of his/her three schools to become the school Exceptional Children's Representative. The final outcome of this arrangement is one parent representative for each of the thirty schools located within the region with ten to twelve parents assuming the primary leadership roles.

Each cluster leader secures a worksite which may be a regional office or a space within a school. Additionally, the cluster leader is charged with implementing the following activities:

(a) Arranging and organizing meetings for training, information sharing, etc.

(b) Participating in the development and implementation of Exceptional Children's Programs and Services.

(c) Monitoring and Evaluating Exceptional Children's Programs and Services.

(d) Collecting and disseminating information to and from individual schools.

(e) Articulating educational and community programs and services.

(f) Interacting with school administrators and faculties, regional administrators and staff and central office administrators and staff - regarding policies, concepts and services.

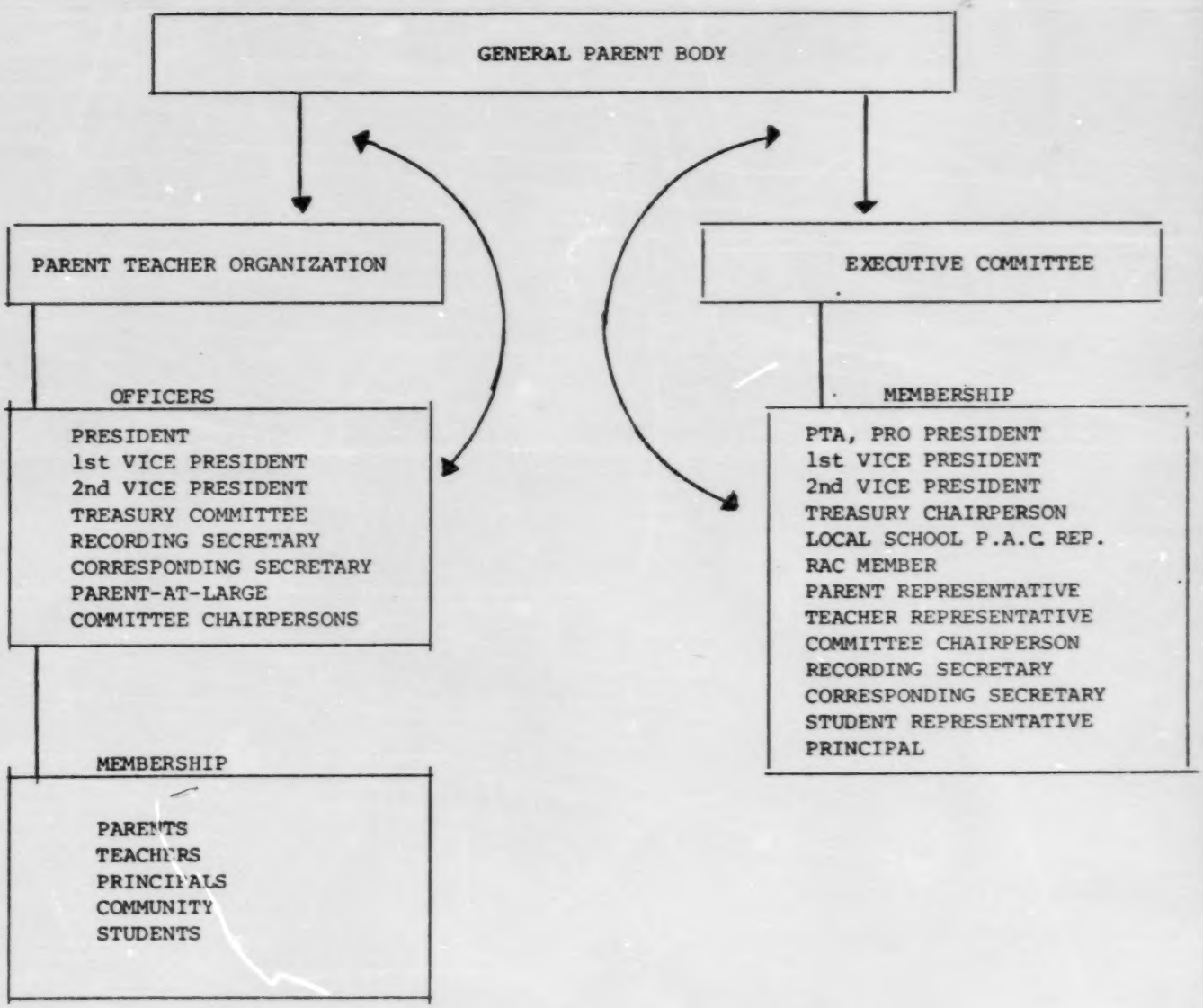
(g) Organizing parent advocacy activities.

(h) Providing volunteer services in schools.

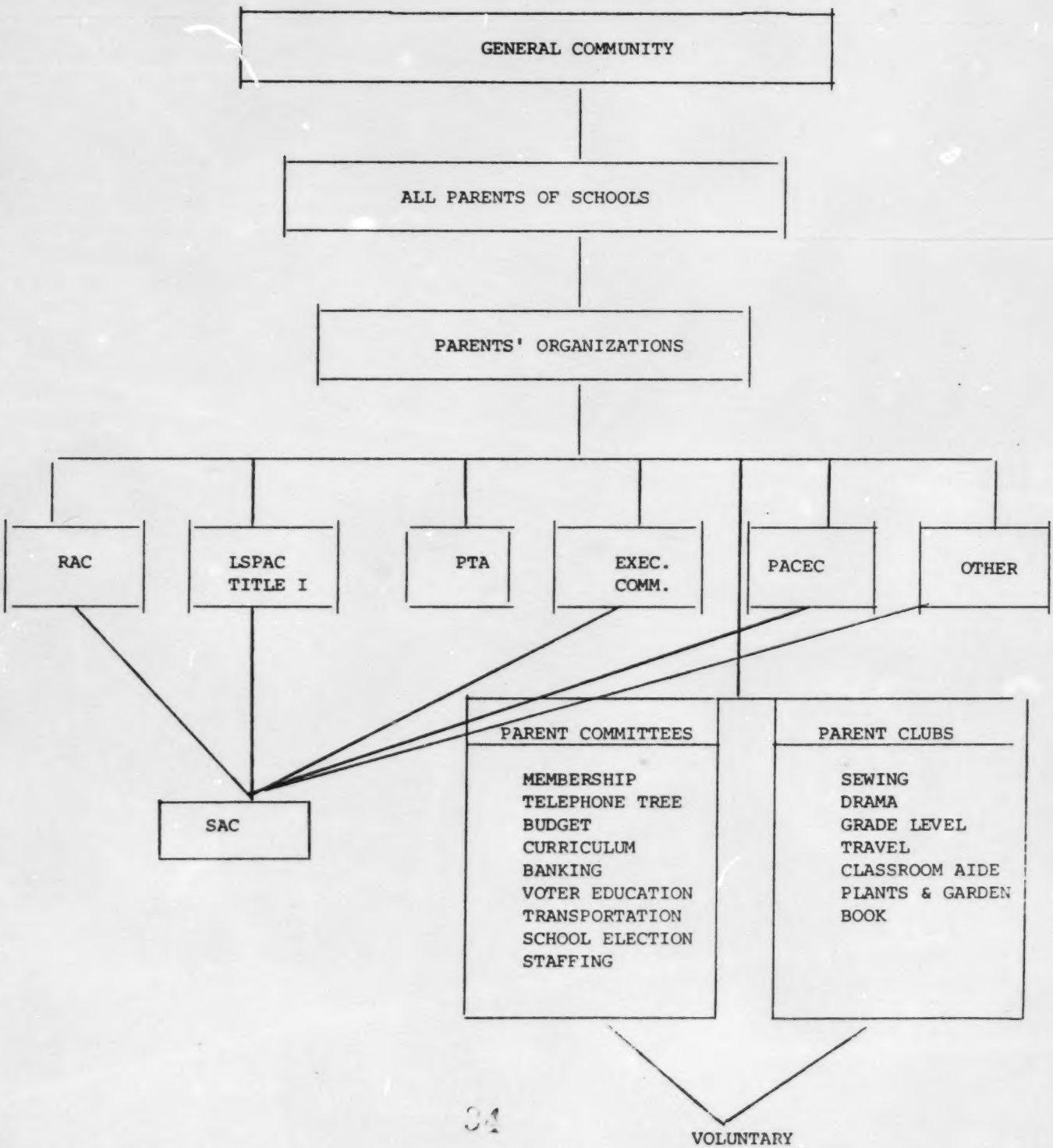
The cluster concept is predicated on maximum home-school collaboration and meaningful utilization of parents in the shaping and molding of their Exceptional Children's educational activities and environments.

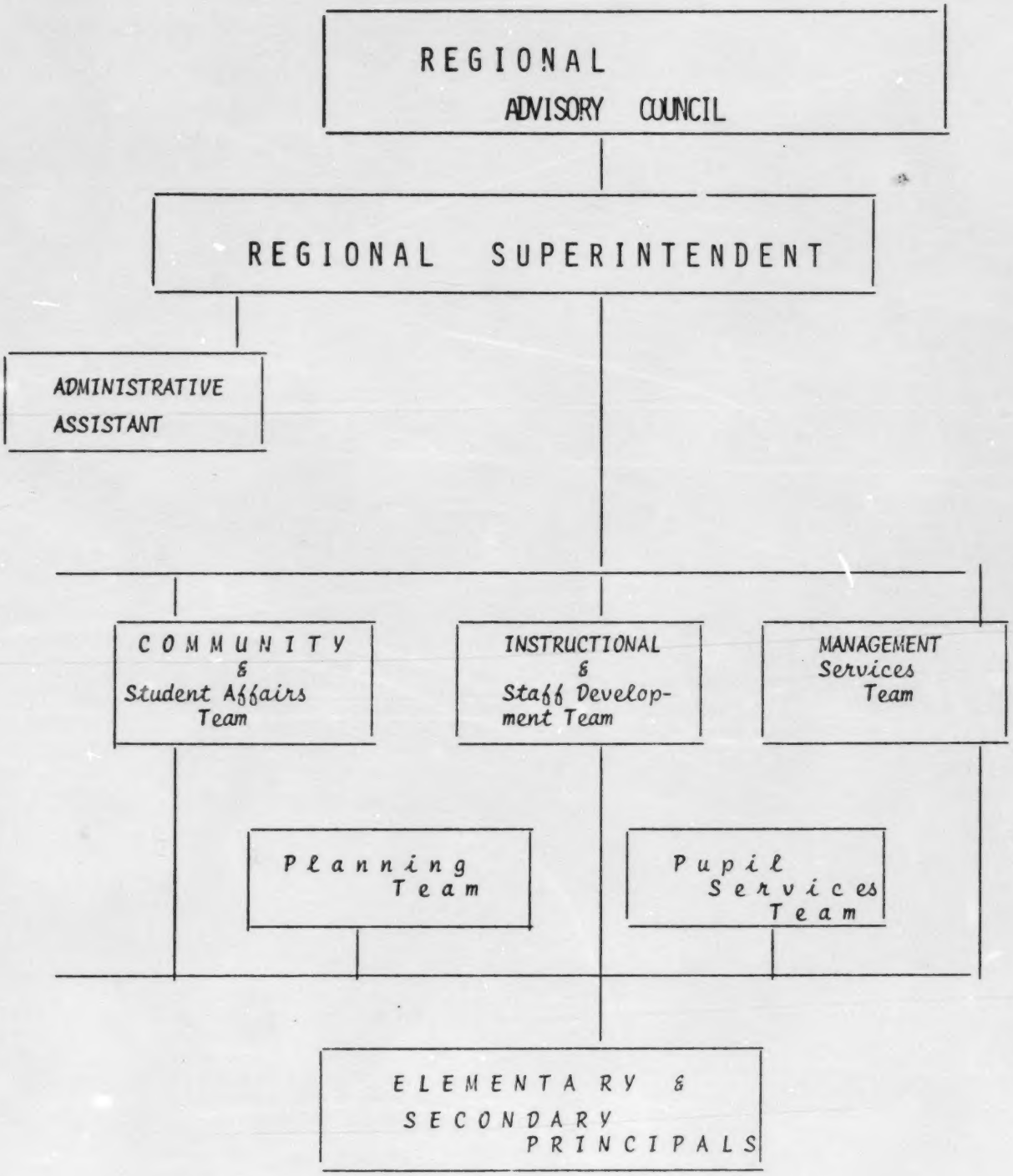
Here are some charts that illustrate parental activities and citywide involvement. The information and advice, made city, reflect the needs of children and parents located in each individual school.

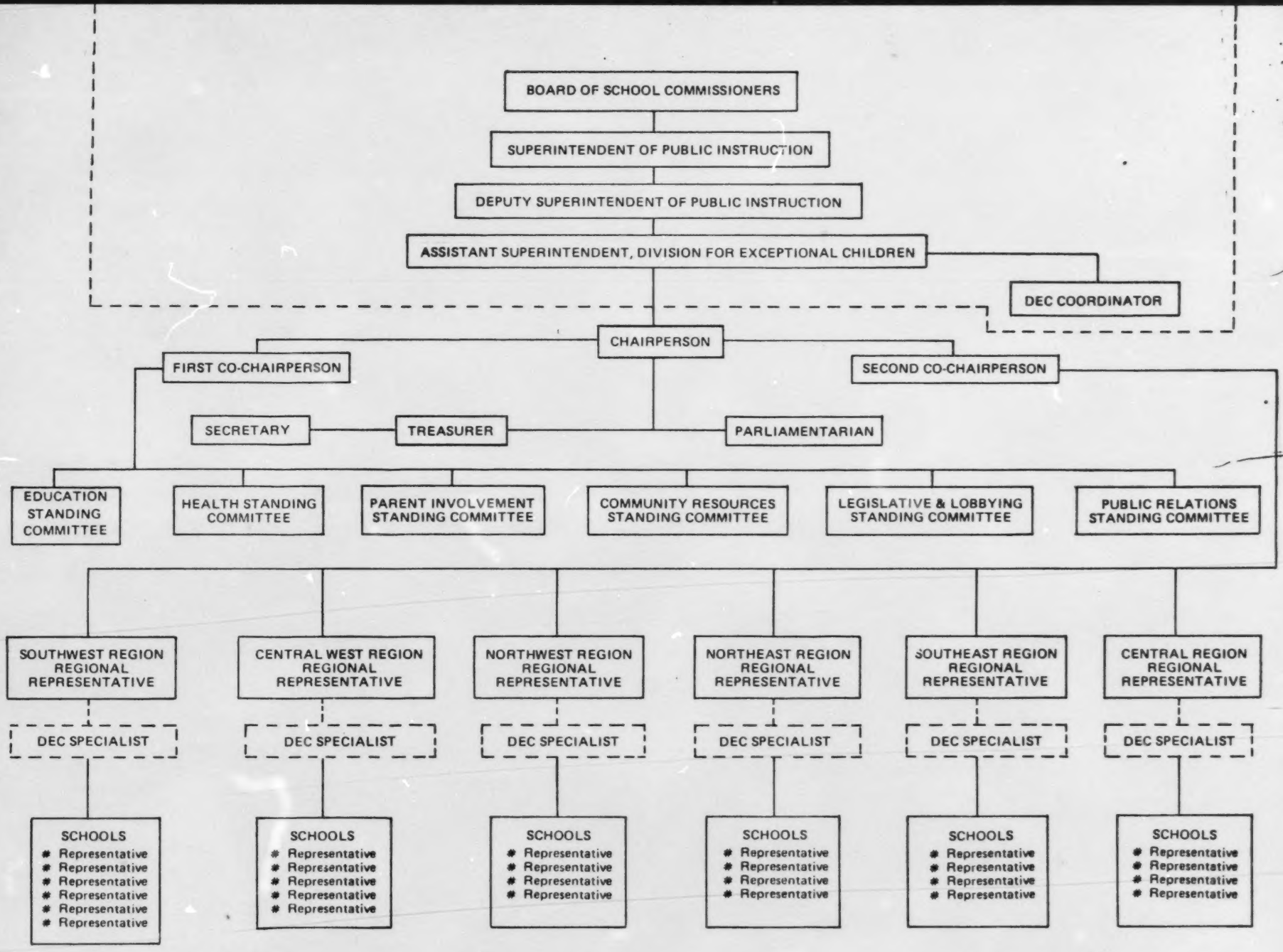
ORGANIZATION OF SCHOOL PARENT ORGANIZATIONS



OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT




REGIONAL
ADVISORY COUNCIL
REGIONAL SUPERINTENDENT
ADMINISTRATIVE
ASSISTANT
COMMUNITY
&
Student Affairs
Team
INSTRUCTIONAL
&
Staff Development
Team
MANAGEMENT
Services
Team
Planning
Team
Pupil
Services
Team
ELEMENTARY &
SECONDARY
PRINCIPALS


BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS
SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT, DIVISION FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN
DEC COORDINATOR
CHAIRPERSON
FIRST CO-CHAIRPERSON
SECOND CO-CHAIRPERSON
SECRETARY
TREASURER
PARLIAMENTARIAN
EDUCATION STANDING COMMITTEE
HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE
PARENT INVOLVEMENT STANDING COMMITTEE
COMMUNITY RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE
LEGISLATIVE & LOBBYING STANDING COMMITTEE
PUBLIC RELATIONS STANDING COMMITTEE
SOUTHWEST REGION REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE
CENTRAL WEST REGION REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE
NORTHWEST REGION REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE
NORTHEAST REGION REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE
SOUTHEAST REGION REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE
CENTRAL REGION REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE
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CITYWIDE PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

Queen Stafford, Chairperson

Anna Coplin, DEC Coordinator
Staff Development/Community Services

Nora E. Cartledge, Assistant Superintendent,
Division for Exceptional Children

Parents of Exceptional Children Citywide

Central West
Regional P.A.C.E.C.
Mary Blackston, Chairperson
Vondalee H. Clark, Regional Superintendent
Leoner P. Pye, DEC Regional Specialist
One Parent from each school

Regional Clusters
Five clusters of six schools each

A	B	C	D	E
405	21	145	181	30
*301	406	202	24	35
142	201	75	157	*78
60	87	*315	*454	28
79	*411	63	29	107
18	67	217	144	138

*Cluster sites

School P.A.C.E.C.
A Parent from Each DEC Class in The School

PARENT CLUSTER GROUPS

A	B	C	D	E
450	21	145	181	30
*301	406	202	24	35
142	201	75	157	*78
60	87	*315	*454	28
79	*411	63	29	107
18	67	217	144	138

Suggested cluster Sites 301, 411,315,454,78

Chairperson for each cluster

Chairperson for each school in Cluster

Classroom leader for each DEC class in the school

Region P.A.C.E.C.

Central West Region

Cluster_____

Co-Chairpersons

Sch.	Name	Address	Zip	Phone
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Cluster School Leaders

School	Name	Address	Zip	Phone
1._____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2._____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3._____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4._____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5._____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6._____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Objectives

- Identify Leader and Co-Leader from each school with D.E.C. program
- Identify Leader and Co-Leader from each D.E.C. class in the school
- Develop telephone tree involving all parents
- To assist in planning cluster w/s training, and organizational sessions for parents
- To assist in developing the school council
- Review with School Principal and/or D.E.C. Department Head ways parents may serve the school

Cluster site school # _____

Principal _____

P.T.A. President

Name	Address	Zip	Phone
_____	_____	_____	_____

CALVERTON JR HIGH SCHOOL #75

PTA SURVEY RE: Volunteers

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

TELEPHONE: _____

NAME OF CHILD(REN) IN OUR SCHOOL:

Name Grade/Class

_____

_____

_____

We would appreciate your help in working with us at Calverton.

Please check the areas that interest you:

_____1. Classroom
_____2. Cafeteria
_____3. Office
_____4. Halls
_____5. Library
_____6. Teacher's Aid
_____7. Peer Parent Group
_____8. Telephone Tree
_____9. P.T.A. Committees
___10. Parent Discussion Group
___11. School Advisory Council

12. Other: (Please Explain)_____

_____

How often will yiu be available to come to school?

_____twice a week _____once a week _____everyday

_____one (1) hour _____two (2) hours _____four (4) hours

_____Other (please explain) _____

Which part of the day is best for you to come to school?

_____ Morning _____Afternoon

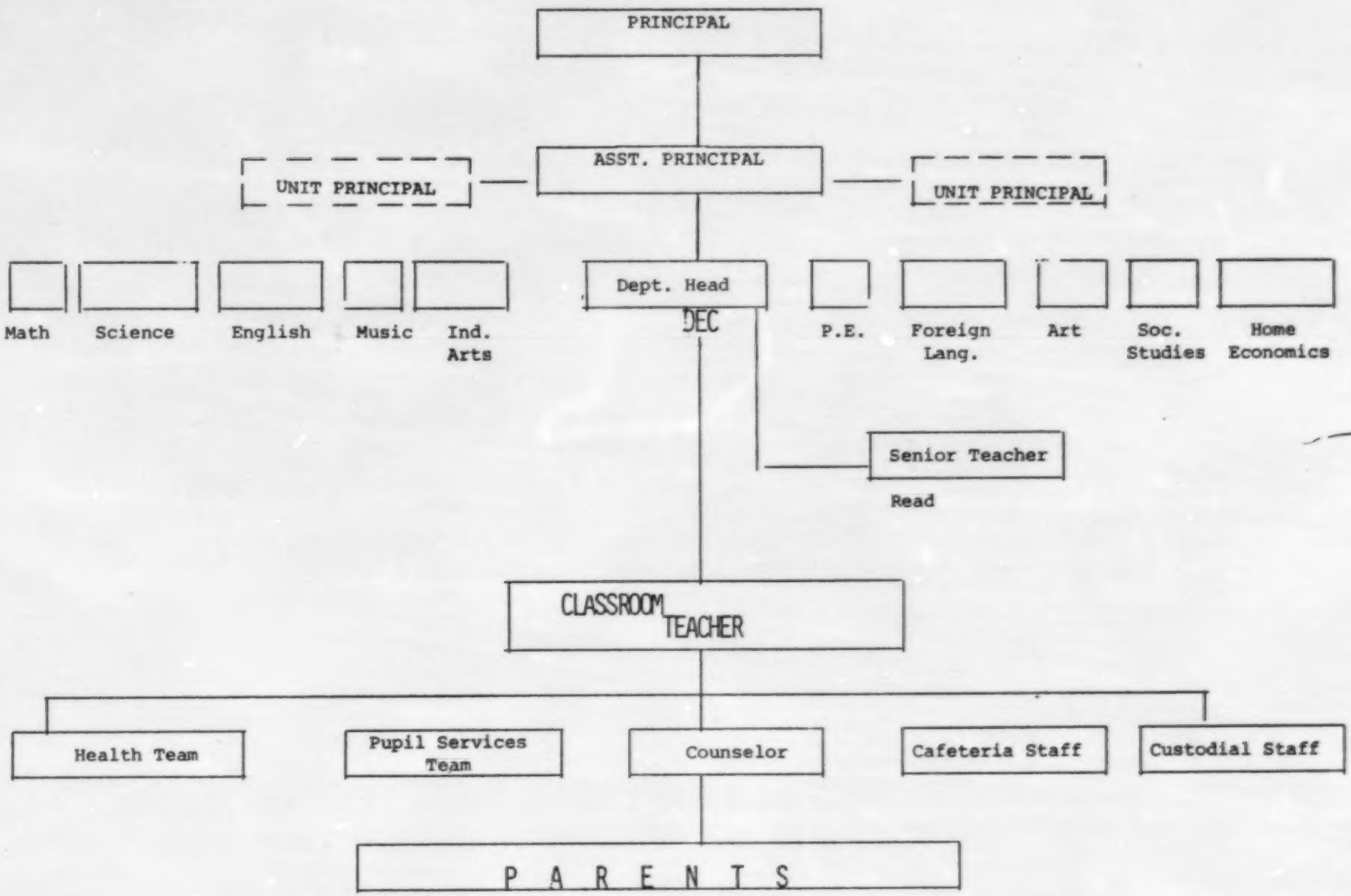
Which week and day would be most conetnient for you to come to school?

Week: 1st 2nd 3rd 4th

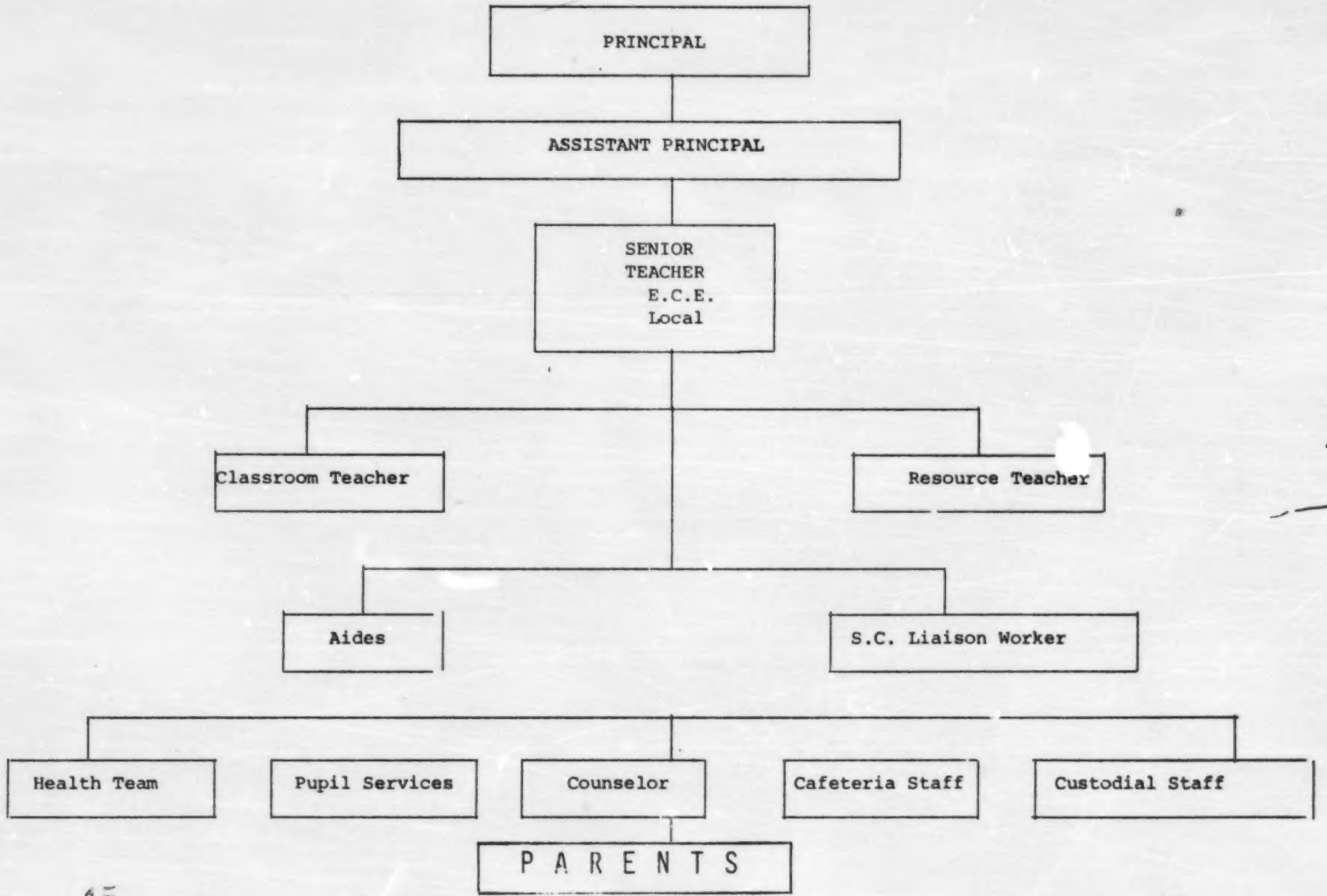
Day: Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday

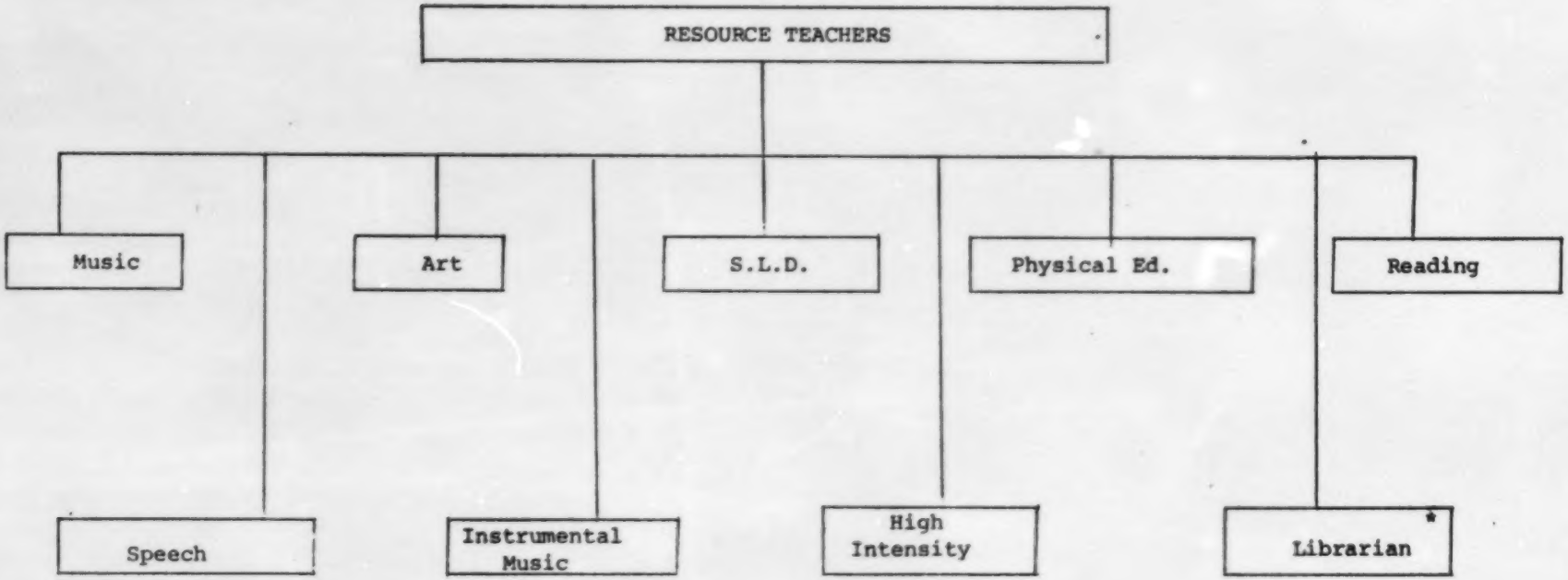
THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP AND WELCOME AGAIN TO CALVERTON.

SECONDARY SCHOOLS



ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS





*(Media Specialist)

School_____ Cluster_____

Class_____

Class Chairmen_____

Class Telephone Captain_____

Phone	Name	Address	Zip	Student's Name

SUMMARY

The material that you have read here represents a beginning only. The continuity and growth of this parent movement is contingent upon a number of uncontrollable variables. The ultimate factors are money and parent education. The cost effectiveness and educational values can only be dealt with in terms of time, the quality of life and its overall impact on society in general. This project is currently producing tremendous research data regarding urban parents and their participation in public education.